

THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

VOL. VI, No. 1

UNION COLLEGE : SCHENECTADY, N. Y.

JANUARY, 1944

"Engineering English"

Letters from Mass. and California Institutes of Technology; concluding a series begun in the December issue.

The idea that there are such brands of English as "Engineering English," "Army English," and "Navy English" is one to which I cannot subscribe. To me the purpose of any basic course in composition is to increase a student's ability to communicate facts and opinions clearly, concisely, exactly. Although the methods by means of which this skill is developed may differ widely in matters of detail, depending upon the background, interests, and objectives of students and upon the training and ingenuity of instructors, the fundamental purpose of the course remains the same.

Since most students in an engineering college are there because they are interested in scientific and technical subjects, the obvious approach for the instructor of English is one which recognizes and utilizes these interests. His students will undoubtedly write and speak frequently on topics that are technical in nature, but they will be required to do so in terms that are understandable to the intelligent person who has had no formal technical training. His students will also become thoroughly familiar with such forms of communication as the letter, the memorandum, and the report because they are essential to engineers and business men. For the same reason students in the Army and Navy training programs need instruction in the forms and procedures of military and naval communications. But these matters are of relatively minor importance in a composition course. Once they are understood the problem facing the instructor is again one of developing skill in clear, accurate expression.

Many people apparently insist that a course which includes any mention of technical subjects and of reports must be labeled "Engineering English" and confined to an engineering college. That attitude seems to me to be completely unwarranted. Except when the use of technical terms is necessary, the engineer's letter or report does not differ from the letter or report which anybody may be required to write if he is a part of any organization. Few intelligent and active citizens can today avoid all contact with scientific and technical subjects and all use of the most common forms of communication. No adequate course in composition can ignore them.

No engineering college, however, can properly train its students in oral and written expression by lim-

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Annual Meeting

War-time emergency led CEA to follow the example of MLA and abandon any plans for an annual meeting—even plans for a regional meeting in New York or Chicago which might assume the authority of an annual meeting and transact business for the entire association. But the CEA Constitution provides for the election of officers and the transaction of other business by mail, in any year, and ballots have accordingly been sent out. Returns are coming in with a deliberation to be expected of teachers who are commonly victimized by questionnaires which must be filled out and provided with postage. This January issue is already late and cannot be held for final results. But the "sampling" on hand suggests final answers to most of the questions, so the following compilation of early returns is presented here:

Of 200 ballots thus far received and counted, not all indicate votes on all questions.

1. Do you favor asking all present officers to serve for another calendar year? Yes—187; No—15.

2. Do you favor simultaneous regional meetings in place of an annual meeting? Yes—138; No—48. (47 different cities are suggested, and the question is often asked, "Why simultaneously?")
3. Do you favor such meetings to be open to all English teachers regardless of membership? Yes—138; No—28.
4. Will you serve on the local committee for such a meeting? Yes—120; No—29.
5. The date for such a meeting? Nine dates are suggested with 60 favoring April 1; 35, April 30; 32, February 27; and the others scattered.
6. Do you favor merger or continuing independent? Merger with MLA—14; National Council—5; continuing independence—170.
7. Title of our publication. Retain present title—168. (Many advise adding CEA); 27 widely scattered votes for other titles.

These majority attitudes quite evidently indicate the final expression of the total membership. But members are asked to send in all ballots before February 1st.

A LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

To The President of the United States,
Dear Mr. President:

Members of the College English Association, a nationwide organization of college teachers of English, respectfully point out to the President and Congress that college teachers are suffering far more severely from the rising cost of living than are workers on the railroads and in the steel mills. We and a few million other salaried men and women are engaged in essential industry; yet the average earnings of college teachers are as low as many classifications of workers who threaten to strike at this time, and far lower than the salaries of those leaders who encourage such threats.

We ask you to call to the attention of these men the fact that our pay has in many cases actually been reduced in war time; also that we know quite as well as they that a few powerful individuals and groups selfishly and disloyally take advantage of the war situation and strive to increase their own profits regardless of the risk of inflation. But we believe that such an attitude on the part of such men does not justify a similar attitude on ours.

We urge upon the attention of Congress that failure to use every possible means to prevent inflation is an evidence of Congressional disregard for the well-being of the whole teaching profession as well as millions of other salaried workers scattered through all states.

Respectfully,
Executive Secretary, CEA.

M. N. 12 in Kansas

Teaching in a Navy shore establishment a thousands miles from salt water would be a unique experience for almost anyone. We attended our first term-end convocation last week, and when the "graduates," who have finished seven or eight terms of work and are now ready for Midshipmen's School, sang with their shipmates "Farewell to Pittsburgh, we are heading out to sea," and "Anchors Aweigh, my boys . . . Farewell to college joys," we all knew that something had happened.

For us instructors the term began in the crowded enrollment room in the library, when two hundred and fifty boys, most of them just out of high school in June, some from other colleges, and twenty-five from the fleet, had their schedules mapped out for them, and learned that it was usually twenty hours a week of the stiffest courses, mathematics, physics, English, history, Naval organization, and physical education. Finally classes started, and the faculty, according to the boys, began to pour it on as they strove to prepare the students for admission to midshipmen's school and eventually for commissions in the United States Navy. Several of the faculty had been unable to obtain commissions in some branch of the service themselves, because of age or the nature of their experience, and, feeling that here was an opportunity to serve, they probably thought they were sinking a Jap ship every time they made a heavy assignment. But that soon corrected itself. Some of the bolder, experienced students from the fleet were not averse to grumbling. This habit annoyed me at first, until I read in the Bluejackets' Manual that grumbling is natural to sailors and indicates a healthy interest in life, if it is not overdone. Also, the eighteen-year-old boys from high school were still immature enough to make a few youngster's objections to studying.

As I outlined the objectives of the course the first day: problems in oral and written communication, reports of events, summaries of readings, explanations of processes or situations, in addition to drills on grammar and vocabulary and fifteen-thousand words of magazine reading a week, someone asked, "What do we do in our spare time?" Another interrupted with "When will this class be over?" and one asked, "When does the next train leave for California?" Soon, however, the boys found that mastering one lesson at a time is not impossible, that the oral summaries of magazine articles come only once a week, and that they can plan on writing one good theme for every Friday. Habit is a won-

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THE NEWS LETTER

Editor

BURGES JOHNSON

J. GORDON EAKER

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Editorial

What is to be the pattern of the post-war college? This question agitates associations and committees and administrators; yet there is no precedent to make us believe that it will differ materially from the pre-war college. The first world war upset our colleges, but when they resumed their even tenor they followed the old patterns. There is only one reason why any upset now should change them, and that is because we really want a change. If it is true that for many years past there has been a slowly accumulating dissatisfaction with many of the processes of our higher education, change may come. But the trouble is that we so seldom know how to stop doing what we are doing in order to start something else.

Some sects within the Christian church are in much the same position. Their creeds and rituals, formulated long ago, no longer represent the beliefs or desires of a majority of their communicants. But the effort required to bring about a change is too great, and the super-sensitivity of the most conservative among them has to be considered. Then, too, there are all the vested interests;—those inside and outside the group who would somehow be harmed by any change create a steady pressure in favor of the status quo.

If only some great cataclysm could occur, we say; a fire or an earthquake or the black plague, what ideal new patterns the survivors might design! They would know all the weaknesses of the old forms, even while venerating their memory; and with such knowledge might go forward to build at once the perfect world.

Everyone now planning a post-war college is thinking that this

war has forced upon us an opportunity to do away with all traditional business which has lost excuse for being, and yet has been too solidly established heretofore to disturb. The four years of undergraduate study, rather than three or five; the courses leading to a Ph.D degree, and the significance given to that degree after it is acquired; the time spent in the study of language, ancient or modern, without a resultant ability to use it in speech; the traditional undergraduate life of the American campus with its tendency to prolong immaturity rather than to hasten maturity; there is no reason why an interval of war should change any of these things.

But we want to believe that this war is something more than a semicolon in the midst of a sentence; it is more than a period at the end of a paragraph; it is an exclamation point at the end of a chapter, and now a new chapter must begin. Some believe that it is "finis" at the end of a volume, and now we may open a new volume written in a new style, with a new flavor of hope in its pages, with a saner and more practical recognition of changed conditions in a swept and garnished world.

To abandon that figure, we hope that we may plan for a different harvest, now that war has plowed under the old. We might indeed have done so on any commencement day in any past year in this twentieth century. But enough hands were not set to the plows, the direction of new furrows was not cleared of old stubble. Plowing under such circumstances takes courage, even daring, with some of the crazy enthusiasm of the old pioneers. Shall we have these qualities when this war is over?

The markings and interlined messages on ballots now coming in from CEA members spell a mandate to officers and directors. If a comparatively small group of college English teachers really enjoy belonging to an independent organization, why should anyone seek to discourage them? Perhaps they have accomplished little in five years, beyond establishing a new sense of fellowship. Yet they have done at least one thing more. They have built a wieldy piece of machinery which operates smoothly and easily. The time may come when it can render important service.

Gleaned From the Mail

Dear Editor:

... Incidentally, now that Ezra Pound has been convicted of high treason, along with several other ex-patriot Americans, I am reminded of Herman Scheffauer. He lived abroad and became a very active German in England. When he was run out of England, he published, in English, a newspaper from Germany full of hostile news and editorials. It was distributed among American soldiers by various devices. I proposed to the Department of Justice that he be found guilty of high treason so that he would never return to this country. This was done and served as

a precedent for Ezra Pound and the others. Scheffauer died in Germany a few years after the war. He wrote excellent poetry. What a pity it is that so many scoundrels write such beautiful poetry.

I once wrote about Villon, that he was supreme as a poet, and at the same time one of the yellowest dogs that ever lived. I think I used this in an article on Viereck, who was also an excellent poet. And what a pity that so many worthy people write such worthless verse!

You ask if I am still writing. For nearly two years I gave so much of my time to the California State Guard, of which I was one of the founders and in which I rose to be a Colonel, that I had very little time for writing. I am trying to get back into the harness, but my radio program takes an enormous amount of time in preparing a very brief fourteen minutes of spouting.

I haven't the faintest idea what sort of teaching our English colleges ought to provide after the war, so I will not waste your time with suggestions.

Rupert Hughes.

Dear Editor:

Instead of griping about what the war has done to education, why doesn't CEA look into the future and take a stand on what civilian education should be after the war, both in colleges and in secondary schools, public and private, and what should be the relation between higher and lower education? See Report on the Training of Secondary School Teachers, Harvard University Press, 1942.

Theodore Morrison.

Dear Editor:

The little joke reprinted in the December News Letter which had for its point the sentence "Your remarks about my ending my sentences with prepositions is one of the things up with which I do not intend to put" is slightly weakened (grammatically) when we realize that the conspicuously misplaced up is an adverb. This reminds us that in the supposedly self-incriminating old saw "A preposition is a bad word to end a sentence with" the with is used adverbially and not as a preposition.

Actually what a number of people mean when they object to such final "prepositions" is that they don't like the informal English verb-adverb combinations and want us to say conclude rather than end with, endure for stand for, investigate for look into, and so on.

P. G. Perrin,
Colgate University.

(In replying to Mr. Perrin your editor offers the following suggestion. In effective writing, any author senses the fact that the position of a word lends emphasis to it. The final word in a sentence, and especially the final word in a paragraph, is echoing in the reader's mind throughout the pause which follows. For that reason, more than for any other, one should hesitate to end a sentence with an insignificant word. But there are

times when a preposition takes on great significance. A tennis player writes: "As an opponent he stimulates my game; he is the sort of player I like to be pitted against." Even the meaning would be slightly changed if he had written, "I like to be pitted against that sort of player." And the right emphasis would be lost.

On the other hand, I might write, "Perrin is a man I hate to disagree with"; but just because of emphasis I prefer the more stilted—"Perrin is a man with whom I hate to disagree."

—Burgess Johnson.)

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"Engineering English"

(Continued from Page One)

iting its course in composition to instruction in writing about technical subjects. The prospective engineer must read and write about other subjects if he is to avoid the undesirable results of concentration in a special field. One of the chief concerns of every department of English in an engineering college is to provide readings and problems in composition which will broaden their student's interests and perspective, and prevent the decrease in working vocabulary which is likely to follow from a high degree of specialization.

Any adequate study of literature is difficult in most engineering colleges. Heavy class and laboratory schedules in professional subjects leave little time for extensive reading. But within the limits of the time available, the purpose of the study of literature is the same as it is for the great majority of students in liberal arts colleges. It is to create a desire for good books, to give a glimpse of the world's store of literary wealth, and to establish sound standards of criticism and evaluation.

Surely a program in English which is planned first to develop a student's ability to communicate facts and ideas clearly, concisely, and exactly, and second to awaken him to the pleasure and the knowledge which await him in good books cannot be accurately labeled "Engineering English" or "Army English."

—H. R. Bartlett,
Mass. Institute of Technology.

We at the California Institute of Technology have considered that the freshman course in composition should not be specialized to meet science or engineering styles, and for two reasons. In the first place we believe that the mechanics—grammar, sentence structure, paragraphing—and the general principles of logical development are the same for all kinds of composition. In the second place we think that the models studied should range over the non-scientific fields in order to develop the interests neglected through too early a concentration on mathematics and science. We do, however, offer to seniors a course in Report Writing.

The freshman course for the V-12 students is directed rather more to special needs than that for civilians, but for it too we use a great deal of material which is general and liberal, not professional in tone.

We have found that the students welcome the opportunity to read and discuss questions in politics, sociology, economics, and even literature, and we have discovered no good reasons for changing our educational principles.

Clinton K. Judy.
California Institute of Technology.

Suggestions For Post-War Colleges

1. Weeding out Incapables Early:—easing out major students if their grades are continuously low, as early as the junior year; this assists the vocational committees, since often students persist at parental whim in attempting work for which they are unsuited.

—refusing graduation to majors with less than C average.

—choosing graduates with more care, supervising them more sharply, watching them for ability to teach, in which they should be assisted by discipline in seminars. Each student should definitely lecture to his class-mates, instead of lounging around a table and droning at them.

—rejecting graduates who show inclinations for limited specialization. It is this that makes pedants.

II. Shift of Accent from Specialization to Cultivation in the Humanities:

—"major" and "minor" efforts to produce rounded students in advanced studies produce merely persons counting up required hours. Manage a better system.

—liberalize examinations to include more than facts; the graduate packs his head with stuff in order to pass instead of showing what he really commands, and has learned a disrespect for judgment, critical values, thought of what he hastily reads in preparation for graduate examinations.

—get rid of fetiches. In Lord Chesterfield's day a man was "illiterate" if he did not command Latin and Greek; now a graduate, even though he has no purpose, interest, reason or will to study primitive English, is obliged to go through a form of "learning" Anglo-Saxon as if it were of chief importance. This is a waste of time, particularly since any study of the history of critical values is brushed aside.

—students of the ancient forms of English should become thoroughly conversant with the other ancient tongues, and enrich their scope in language; no ancient language is of value by itself. Celtic should be encouraged in America, since of all the languages in ancient Britain, Celtic is the only one with a literature which makes it worth our while to study the tongue. In turn this should lead to a study of folk lore, and if possible ethnology, without which ancient languages are dead wood.

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—M. Bailey,
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"THE READER OVER YOUR SHOULDER," by Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, (Macmillan), is hardly a handbook, certainly not a good one. But its destructive analysis of passages from contemporary writers, some of them eminent, ought to be useful in counteracting certain doctrines about English usage which give both teachers and students the notion that bad English, when perpetrated by a number of well-known writers, becomes good English. I have always believed that if many of the examples cited as current usage were called to the attention of their authors, these would readily admit that they had blundered. Certainly, bad writing is bad writing, no matter how many famous authors are at times guilty of it; and this book ought to help some of us to recover our senses and stop corrupting the young.

Bird Stair,
The City College,
New York.

G. I. CHRISTMAS

*The guys in coveralls crowd past the stove,
("Space-Heater" reads the damper-plate), allow
The sergeant room to warm himself; eyes rove
Across the pin-up girls. The smell of chow
Expands, and multiples of kitchen sounds
Alert a multiple of mess kits. Loud
Dissenters catalogue the menu; rounds
Of pro and con discharge among the crowd
As Joes from Boston spot the turkey, kids
From Maine the oyster stew; there's pie about,
And raisin bread, and steam pounds under lids
Of Army pots, and crowns the coffee spout.
They're sweating out a thousand lines this way,
The guys in coveralls, on Christmas Day.*

Codman Hialop.

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read JOHN BROWN'S BODY
you will want to add WEST-
ERN STAR to their list.

V-12 IN KANSAS

(Continued from Page One)

derful thing to get on your side, and as the weeks rolled around, the seamen settled down and began to enjoy life. Most of them were grateful for the opportunity of attending college.

The civilian students and the college administration did all they could to assimilate the boys into the regular college activities. A few dances were arranged, assembly programs were planned, music lovers attended the college presentation of the opera *Faust*, the faculty got over the novelty of the situation, and the educational process went on smoothly. In our English classes we assigned some theme topics to help the students build a bridge from their past to their new experiences: "How I Joined the V-12," "My Experiences in the Navy So Far," and "My Home Town." Homesickness was plain in the nostalgic language with which they described a home valley in California, an irrigated farm in Arizona, or Saturday night in a small Oklahoma town. Letters from home were often read surreptitiously in the morning recitation periods. But people in the civic clubs and churches welcomed the boys, invited them into their homes for Sunday dinner, and had them speak and sing at programs, and showed them the friendliness Kansas is famous for.

Gradually the boys yielded to Navy discipline and began to realize the purpose of it all. Talks with their shipmates from the fleet, their lectures in Naval Organization, the movies of the Battle of Midway, for example, helped direct their efforts toward their coming responsibilities as naval officers. The keynote in my classes was struck when the boys, after writing of their Navy experiences thus far, heard a classmate who had been on the first U.S.S. Hornet, from which Jimmie Doolittle bombed Tokyo, tell of the taking off of the planes on that famous mission. One plane almost hit the water, but managed to gather headway. The recitation stopped while we plied him with questions, which were cheerfully answered. He had no more than finished when a man who had served on the U.S.S. Yorktown jumped to his feet with "Let me tell you about the Yorktown," and without a request he was in front of the class, diagramming on the blackboard for us the Battle of Midway and the part which his ship played in it.

Later, the boy from the Hornet, wrote a theme, perhaps the most remembered of the term, about the announcement which came over the loud-speaker system on his carrier that Japanese planes were coming at them out of the sun. "Stand by to repel dive-bombing and torpedo attack." This lad had manned a gun all day, and will never forget the captain's words as he said, "All hands, abandon ship! Good luck, and God be with you." Class recitations could never be the same humdrum English after that, or after the carpenter's mate from the Yorktown told of standing in hip-boots keeping a drain open

while water, blood, and human flesh were pouring into it. No wonder he told of a subsequent three-months' case of the "jitters," lowered his eyes, and nervously took his seat, while his classmates looked on in silent sympathy.

I believe it is simple American courage and the confidence born of the conviction that they are serving their country for good pay that explains the high quality of the semester's work. Of course, the men are a picked group, chosen on the basis of competitive examinations for the most part. There are never absences except for sickness, and almost all assignments come in on time and complete. They boys enjoy their reading from magazines and are learning much about the contemporary world. They are learning to speak easily before their classmates. The men also seem well grounded in mechanics and the practical experiences that Navy officers should have. Different boys explained easily from blackboard diagrams how to read a weather-map, how the V-8 motor works, how to wire a radio set, how to survey; and they could describe clearly a telephone, a diesel engine, a camera, a rifle, an airplane wing, or a tanker. Physics and English courses merged with a study of scientific vocabulary. Perhaps the motivation behind such assignments helps to explain their success.

When it came time to explain the form for Navy correspondence, everyone saw immediately the value of conciseness, of organization, of clarity, and of impersonality. Vocabulary study was motivated by our compiling more than two hundred terms, slang and others, peculiar to the Navy. This is only part of their daily thinking for on the football field one hears "shove off," "scuttlebutt," "stand by," and "on the double." Perhaps the pragmatists are right in feeling that education should be tied up closely with experience.

One cannot say for sure how these young men, most of whom still have several terms to go, will turn out. Some few will fall by the wayside, unable to make their grades. But one has every ground for predicting that most of them will become officers worthy of the best traditions of the Navy. The spirit which they show on the football field, where Hardin Simmons (Abilene, Texas) and Texas Tech. (Lubbock, Texas) boys play side by side with their former collegiate rivals, the humor and zest which they put into campus stump speeches at student election time, and the earnestness with which they talk about post-war problems, all argue well for the future.

The only pity is that such fine young men, with contagious enthusiasm, courtesy, and good humor, must be sent out to fight, and some to die. What a waste of our finest manhood is war! Seeing them go should make us redouble our efforts to bring a lasting peace to the world.

J. Gordon Eaker,
State Teachers College,
Pittsburg, Kan.

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